DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 058 CE 055 155

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Dumont, Bernard |
| TITLE | Post-Literacy: A Pre-Requisite for Literacy. Literacy Lessons. |
| INSTITUTION | International Bureau of Education, Geneva (Switzerland). |
| PUB DATE | 90 |
| NOTE | 17p.; For other "Literacy Lessons" booklets, see CE 055 128-167. Also available in French. |
| AVAILABLE FROM | International Bureau of Education, P.O. Box 199, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland. |
| PUB TYPE | Reports - General (140) |
| EDRS PRICE | MF01/PC01 Plus Postage. |
| DESCRIPTORS | Access to Education; Adult Education; Adult Literacy; *Adult Reading Programs; Developing Nations; Disadvantaged Environment; Early Reading; Foreign Countries; Functional Literacy; *High Interest Low Vocabulary Books; Illiteracy; Instructional Materials; Literacy Education; *Material Development; Outcomes of Education; *Reader Text Relationship; *Reading Materials; Reading Material Selection; Reading Skills; *Retention (Psychology) |
| IDENTIFIERS | International Literacy Year 1990; *Post Literacy |

ABSTRACT

Post-literacy is all the means and activities that allow persons who have recently become literate to make use of their skills and to increase and deepen the knowledge acquired. There are many kinds of literacy. What they all have in common is the merciless test of the durability of literacy's effect: After 1, 2, or 5 years, what will the beneficiaries have retained and what uses will they be making of their literacy? Relapse to illiteracy is one of the most serious threats to literacy because it is very widespread and because it leaves its victims, who sacrificed to become literate, more destitute and less motivated. The remedy is post-literacy. The three aspects that are involved in providing post-literacy are the production of materials to which the knowledge acquired can be applied; the creation of a literacy environment; and the possibility of access to higher levels of responsibility for newly literate people. Reading materials for new readers include general interest books, short, easy-to-read popular works that provide practical information; periodicals; publications of a less didactic, more entertaining nature, such as comic strips; calendars, posters, leaflets, and booklets; and audiovisual media. Because most of the world's illiterate people live in an environment virtually bereft of written material of any kind, the cooperation must be sought of all decision-makers in those areas who are in a position to contribute to the multiplication of public, written information. No literacy project can be effective without attending to post-literacy. (CML)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED321058

LITERACY LESSONS

CE 055 155

INTERNATIONAL LITERACY YEAR

# Post-literacy: a pre-requisite for literacy

by Bernard Dumont

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S Adiusz

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF EDUCATION



BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Strictly speaking, a printed text is intended for those who know how to read. The present work, in particular, is not so much destined for illiterates, as for those who have knowledge and means of action, who wish to help the cause of literacy, and who need to be informed. Contrary to common belief, it is with these people in mind that we can assert that post-literacy comes *before* literacy.

At first glance, the word 'post-literacy' seems to suggest that what this expression refers to, namely all the means and activities which allow persons who have recently become literate to make use of their skills and to increase and deepen the knowledge acquired, comes after literacy.

But that assumption is only valid from a certain point of view, namely the sequence of events, and for certain people, namely those who have recently experienced a training course and the graduated nature and durability thereof. This is not at all valid for two other categories of persons who are particularly concerned: illiterates and those responsible for making decisions and implementing activities in favour of literacy.

Indeed, what is the illiterate interested in when he is a candidate for literacy? In the process of learning to read and write, in the investment in terms of time and effort which he will need to make? Or in the result he hopes to achieve, in what he will be able to do after having attained a certain level of skill in arithmetic, in reading and in writing? For the illiterate individual, what is most important, what he is looking for most, is to be able to read the letters and documents by means of which he hopes to improve his quality of life, to be able to calculate a price, a sum or a yield, to be able to write to family and friends, and lastly, to be able to commit to writing that which formerly he could

express only orally, leaving no lasting trace. For the illiterate, what is envisaged, what draws his attention, is what it will be possible for him to do once he has achieved a first result: this is what we call post-literacy.

This fact is – or should be – even more evident to those who devise, design and plan a literacy campaign, no matter what its scope. Indeed, the experience gained by literacy workers in the most diverse circumstances reveals that there is not just one kind of literacy, but several, each differing according to the beneficiaries, contexts, contents, methods, organization and short, medium and long-term goals. What they all have in common, is the merciless test of the durability of its effect in every case: after one, two or five years, what will the beneficiary have retained and what uses will he be making of his literacy?

*The danger of relapse*

Of all the threats to literacy, without a doubt one of the most serious is relapse into illiteracy, that is, the loss of the ability to read and write, resulting from lack of practice and insufficient upkeep. It constitutes a threat, first of all, because it is very widespread and affects a portion, varying in size according to the situation but always significant, of the beneficiaries of literacy, whether they be adults or children of school age (resulting in what nowadays is referred to as 'functional illiteracy', that is, the inability, independent of the level of education attained, to comprehend written messages related to everyday life). It is a threat, furthermore, because, by eradicating the sacrifices made, it leaves the victims, be they individuals or communities, more destitute and less motivated: 'What good is our mobilization if this is all it achieves?'

The remedy, as is well known, is post-literacy. What is less well known is that in order for post-literacy work to be effective, it must not be restricted to the produc-

tion of second-level reading materials. Indeed, three aspects are involved, none of which may be overlooked, as all of them must be taken into account as soon as the preparatory work for a literacy campaign begins. These aspects are:

- the production of materials to which the knowledge acquired can be applied;
- the creation of a literacy environment;
- the possibility of access to higher levels of responsibility on the part of new literates.

## PREPARATION OF READING MATERIALS

Reading materials especially designed, produced and distributed to help neo-literates put their recently acquired knowledge into practice can take on extremely diverse forms, and our stock of experience and know-how in the field of literacy provides numerous examples, for instance:

- 'general interest' books, to borrow a current expression used in educational circles; for adults, this type of reading material consists of short, easy-to-read, popular works which provide practical information related to real life situations and development (health, family and civic life, income-earning activities in towns and rural areas, etc.) and are designed to enable reading-assisted beginners to make the transition towards true, independent reading;
- periodicals, complementing teaching works with information which is ever-current and more in touch with recent events, and which strengthen the contacts between new literates and their less immediate environment; this could involve specific newspapers, entirely conceived, published and distributed for the benefit of recent literates, such as the 'rural press' made popular in Africa with the active participation of Unesco; or supplements inserted in major news-

papers which facilitate the transition to the habitual frequentation of this form of press;

- publications of a less teaching, more entertaining nature, comic strips, 'photo-romans' (picture novels) or other illustrated works capable of bringing printed materials 'out of the classroom' and which encourage the reading of works of fiction;
- various mass distribution materials such as calendars, posters, leaflets and booklets which, in conjunction with other media (radio, cinema, television) are used to launch national multimedia information or sensitization campaigns on themes of general interest, related to development in particular: the struggle to prevent desertification, environmental protection, education on health and nutrition, etc.; these materials, together with the initiatives mentioned above, by fostering the creation of an environment favourable to literacy, help pave the way for the transition;
- audiovisual media (radio, films, television) can also be used, where they are available, as the main means of support for the distribution or utilization of reading materials for neo-literates.

The more coherence and continuity these materials share with the materials and methods used to teach literacy, and the more they enhance the quality of life by satisfying the needs felt or expressed by the public for whom they are intended, the more effective they will be. The dissemination of these materials, via fixed or mobile library networks or continuing education centres, is similar to that of literacy materials, and involves the same priorities of continuity, regularity and educational support or activities.

This is why programmes for the production and dissemination of post-literacy materials are frequently entrusted to the same authorities as the initial literacy project, and why these authorities find themselves, for the most part, on familiar ground, provided that the

entire literacy and post-literacy process is well-programmed and planned from the outset, even if it becomes increasingly necessary to enlist outside help, particularly for the drafting and publishing of less didactic materials.

## THE CREATION OF AN ENVIRONMENT FAVOURABLE TO LITERACY

In contrast, the authorities in charge of literacy work, both public services and private organizations, more often than not under the aegis of a ministry of education or of social affairs, cannot be the only, or almost only ones involved when it comes to creating an environment favourable to literacy. Changing the main system of communication within an overall framework of existence can only come about as the result of a conscious, voluntary effort on the part of all those having the power and resources to make decisions capable of having a significant impact on society.

Indeed, it is important to realize that the vast majority of the world's 800 to 900 million illiterates are not isolated individuals within literate populations, but constitute majorities in areas where, on the one hand, oral communication is predominant (not to mention a widespread ability to interpret significant natural phenomena in a common, direct way) and lack of facilities, on the other. In various areas of the Third World, the traveller will find vast regions in which the written word remains the exception: no sign posts along paths or in or near towns, no billboards (it is not the purpose here to promote this form of communication, but only to indicate that its absence betrays the generalized non-existence of public texts), no postal service to bring manuscripts or printed material to villages, in other words no, or very little, reliance on writing in everyday life.

It has been observed that in an environment teeming with written signs and messages, the child, as well as the adult undergoing literacy training, is constantly surrounded by reminders, confirmations and a kind of echo of what he is learning in his classes, and to a large extent teaches himself literacy, with virtually no particular effort of memorization added to formal training sessions. In the opposite situation, everything the neo-literate learns in an area where writing is nonexistent must take a special personal effort of concentration and memorization, and he has virtually no opportunity to apply on the outside what he has learned in formal training sessions.

This is why, if a post-literacy programme is to be effective, it must include the sensitization of all decision-makers (authorities responsible for equipment, urbanism and highways, local municipalities industrial and commercial business, etc.) who are in a position to contribute to the multiplication of public, written information, although this may not be their objective or may be far from being one of their priorities.

FOLK DEVELOPMENT COLLEGES
IN THE UNITED REPUBLIC OF TANZANIA

*The folk development colleges (FDC) were created beginning in 1975 to receive adult volunteers who had been selected by their respective communities (villages, cooperatives) according to the needs of the community in terms of skills with a view to improving self-sufficiency. Stable yet flexible in structure, scattered throughout the entire country, the eighty folk development colleges organize training courses of varying durations (from one week to a year) in all fields likely to contribute to the improvement of living conditions: hygiene, horticulture, animal husbandry, applied crafts, etc. From 1975 to 1988 they received over 120,000 adults who were able to return afterwards to their villages to take up the responsibilities for which they were chosen and trained. The FDC have played a fundamental role in the post-literacy policy and activities in connection with the post-literacy campaign underway since 1970 to eliminate illiteracy in the United Republic of Tanzania.*

The constant presence of the written word in an everyday context, however, is only one element among many others of an environment favourable to literacy. Less evident, but just as important, are the multiplication and adaptation of vocational training programmes, and a sufficiently clear definition of the status of the literacy languages.

*Vocational training*

The improvement of living conditions, which is one of the strongest motivations for both individuals and communities to seek literacy, generally depends on increasing productivity, both in towns and in rural areas. Agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, as well as many lucrative activities in towns and nearby are learned by emulation and are practised to a large extent in an empirical manner. Although these methods sometimes make possible the invention or introduction of positive innovations based on acquired practical experience, it is certain that productive activity in a primarily illiterate environment would gain enormously in effectiveness and output if easy access to occupational training existed.

Technical and occupational instruction, both public and private, constitute, where they exist, a first response to this need for young people engaged in an educative process. But, in the majority of cases, neoliterates coming from primary schools, sometimes without having completed their studies, or from adult education courses, do not have access to this kind of instruction which, in any case, would be poorly adapted to their needs, since most often they are not designed or organized to take into account the experience which adults and even adolescents have acquired outside the classroom.

In this respect, the effort to be made clearly concerns the quantity, diversity and geographical distribution of the courses to be created or developed but it also con-

cerns their design and the methods they use so as to bring formal and non-formal education systems closer together. There are many examples of such kinds of original, suitably adapted training programmes organized by public bodies, occupational groups or associations and open to both recently literate adults and young people having left school prematurely.

*The status of literacy languages*

The languages of literacy pose genuinely complex problems. The problems related to the scientific study of these languages, to the system of transcription used for them, and to choices concerning their use are dealt with elsewhere. We will only mention here those which influence the success of post-literacy initiatives and which, for the most part, are linked to their status: these problems are far from being the simplest.

In many countries where several languages coexist, some of which are spoken in the home and others – generally foreign to the locality and even the country – are used in trade and administrative activities, the choice of one (or more than one) language of literacy often depends on cultural and educational criteria, with the result that the languages which are spoken in the home context and which best express the environment and the understanding of the group are usually the ones chosen. This is perfectly justified, since the goal of literacy work is to give individuals and communities the means to better comprehend the context in which they live, but also because the effort required in order to learn the mechanics of reading, writing and arithmetic is already rather considerable without adding the burden of simultaneously learning a foreign language.

However, once the first stages are passed, the sometimes limited prevalence of the native language can be an obstacle to information exchange and openness to the outside world, giving the neo-literate a sense of

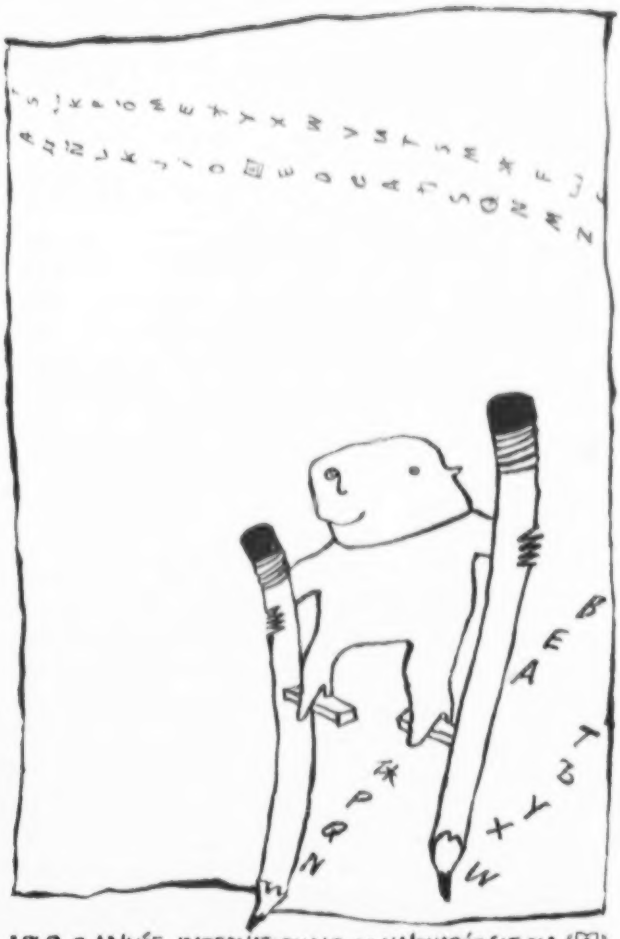
confinement and, eventually, a feeling that the effort made was of little value. It is therefore necessary that the status of the various languages present be clarified and that neo-literates be given the opportunity to have access to other languages which are more widely used.

To be sure, the status of a language is primarily a question of the linguistic habits of the masses of users, but it can also be influenced by decisions of a political nature related to its use for administrative (bilingual identification cards or official gazettes) or economic purposes, as well as in education systems.

The possibility of learning a national or other language which is more widespread or more official in nature than that used for literacy, and which gives broader access to desired training opportunities and activities, presupposes the elaboration and production of methods and manuals which are based, naturally, on a knowledge of the language or languages of literacy and the training of trainers. It can be easily imagined that for many reasons all this must be prepared long before the first waves of neo-literates appear.

These remarks concerning the elements comprising an environment favourable to literacy clearly show the minimum requirements for its achievement:

- broad cooperation between the various categories of decision-makers (political, economic and technical) in order to coordinate the various activities necessary for the creation of this environment;
- early, global planning of the entire literacy and post-literacy process (of children as well as adults, taking into consideration the vagaries of education): that is, the inescapabilty of an approach involving lifelong education.


1990 ANNÉE INTERNATIONALE DE L'ALPHABÉTISATION

## ACCESS TO RESPONSIBILITY: PARTICIPATION

Although this declaration is the culmination of a long series of concordant statements and proclamations, not all decision-makers everywhere and in all circumstances have drawn all the consequences and applications which could be desired.

The concept of participation can only be meaningful and effective if it is taken in the broadest sense of the word and is applied at all stages, from the most modest to the most decisive, of the literacy and decision-making process. Thus the most successful literacy and post-literacy campaigns, that is, those whose long-term effects most often take the form of positive changes in living conditions, frequently spring from initiatives made by the beneficiaries themselves and the organization which they give themselves at the basic community level, thereby making best use of the materials and training programmes which specialists can offer them.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEWSPAPER 'KIBARU'

*Of the 'rural newspapers' in literacy languages which were created in Africa with the help of Unesco, the Malian monthly 'Kibaru' is remarkable because of the role of texts originating from neo-literates. Since it was launched in 1972, it has been receiving from its readers an abundant flow of mail, exceeding a hundred letters per month, extracts of which take up more than half of the printed space. The themes addressed are extremely diverse and include not only practical questions related to living conditions, but also an extremely rich 'literacy' production: poems, songs, stories, riddles, proverbs, some of which originate in the traditional heritage, but many which are the work of peasants who have recently become literate, thrilled by the possibilities which the recent transcription of their language offers them, and stimulated by this powerful communication tool. The enduring success of 'Kibaru' obviously owes much to the cultural identity which enriches the dialogue between the readers and the authors, who are likewise neo-literate, rural people.*

Likewise, there are numerous cases in which texts – literary, technical or even scientific – which have been used most successfully in post-literacy work have been the product of this kind of activity (creative writing or transcription of oral traditions) on the part of the communities concerned. Thus the truth that innovation is all the better accepted and adopted (or adapted) if it originates in the fertile soil of a rich and living culture.

But the concept of participation cannot be limited to educative or literacy activities.

The young person, adult or the community, who have provided themselves with the tools which grant access to a greater volume of information and communication and to understanding the world around them and to changing it, will not content themselves with remaining mere spectators. A development project can no longer be conceived, organized and implemented in an area in which post-literacy work is underway as it would have been in the past; that which is often still presented as a 'management' system will have to reserve an ever more important role for the newly acquired abilities of neo-literates to intervene and organize as the result of the coming of the written word into everyday life. Accordingly, mutual rural loan cooperatives have sprung up and function in places where previously countless loans granted to a 'managed' peasantry failed to contribute to real development.

This is, of course, equally true, but ever so much more complex, in the areas of civic and political responsibility: the participation of neo-literates in public life can lead to new orientations at a time of important decisions and the calling into question of certain privileges. In cases where this is made impossible because of resistance from established situations, it is to be feared that, realising the ineffectiveness of their new knowledge against vested privileges, new literates will

become discouraged and neglect maintaining and further developing their skills, thus, by their example, dissuading other literacy candidates – unless other forms of action can provide them with the means of having their participation in decisions which concern them accepted.

Given the several examples we have just cited, it can be seen how much attention, preparation and political will must be devoted to the question of participation. Even if it is incumbent upon literacy technicians to enlighten, if necessary, political authorities with regard to the complexity of post-literacy, it is they who will be essentially responsible for programming and its implementation, and consequently, for its long-lasting success.

Does this explain the difficulties which so many other literacy initiatives have encountered?

> *Literacy is inseparable from participation, which is at once its goal and its condition.*
> Declaration in 1975 at the International Symposium for Literacy, Persepolis.

# CONCLUSIONS: NO EFFECTIVE LITERACY PROJECT WITHOUT, FIRST, A CLEARLY DEFINED AND WELL-PREPARED POST-LITERACY PROJECT

In view of the damage caused by relapse into illiteracy, there is no doubt that literacy limited to the basic mechanics of reading, writing and arithmetic, with no follow-up making it possible to utilize and improve the initial skills acquired, could prove to be globally more harmful than useful, and that literacy and post-literacy form an indissociable whole.

Moreover, to achieve a certain degree of effectiveness among the learning public, this whole must correspond to a unified objective and method; to carry out the first phase and then realize later that the second must obey a different logic is out of the question. Literacy work must be designed, organized and implemented according to what is envisaged for the post-literacy phase.

But the post-literacy phase itself raises questions and prerequisites, demands cooperation and decisions, meaning that preparation must begin long before implementation, even before literacy operations commence.

An undertaking of such scope, therefore, cannot be envisaged without rigorous (which does not mean rigid) planning in order that the necessary decisions and means be available when required so that the programme can progress smoothly.

More importantly, if disappointments and frustrations are to be avoided, firm political determination is needed in order that literacy training – not only of children in schools, but also of adults – might serve as

the first stage of a continuous, global process guaranteeing for all men equal opportunity to express themselves and make themselves understood when their welfare and their future are at stake.

This publication has been produced by the International Bureau of Education within the context of International Literacy Year, 1990.

The International Bureau of Education acknowledges with grateful thanks this contribution by Bernard Dumont to the cause of Literacy. Born in France in 1928, Mr Dumont created, between 1950 and 1965, various bodies for intercultural exchange and training. Between 1966 and 1986 he was successively involved in literacy work, adult continuing vocational training and promoting solidarity with the Third World. He is currently responsible for several associations involved in training, development and North-South solidarity.

This document is available in English and French and can be freely reproduced, and translated into other languages. It would be appreciated if a copy of any publication reproducing this text in full or in part could be sent to: (1) ED/PBL, Unesco, 7 Place de Fontenoy, 75700 Paris, France; and (2) IBE, P.O. Box 199, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland.

Readers are reminded that the opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of Unesco. The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Unesco Secretariat concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Published in 1990 by Unesco: International Bureau of Education,
P.O. Box 199, 1211 Geneva 20, Switzerland.